Lafayette Historical Society
NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549

President: William Wakeman (283-3908)
Editor: Shirley Thomson (284-2995)

Vol. XIX, No. 1
January 1992

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope everyone had a pleasant holiday season.

With the beginning of January, we have to get started on programs for 1992. Before saying goodbye to 1991, however, I must thank Collette Means for all her help on the history walks on October 20, 1991, and for her coordination of the walking tours program for fourth graders.

Please remember that annual dues for 1992 ($10 for family membership) are due this month. If you wish to become a life member at $100, then you wouldn't have to pay dues each year any more. You'll find the dues mailer at the end of this newsletter.

Our remarkable editor has written articles about events that are proposed for 1992 and you'll find them in the following pages. Regarding day trips: If you have any ideas, please let Jop Van Overveen know. And be sure to mark you calendar for our annual potluck dinner meeting in May; Tom Crews will be talking to us about the Pony Express in Contra Costa.

Last but not least: Our fire engine, "Old Betsy," is getting tired and looks a little ratty. George Wasson tells us a complete rejuvenation might cost as much as $5,000. So . . . we are looking for experts on Ford Model T repairs and overhaul – or money to get it done professionally.

Best regards,

William Wakeman

TIME FOR DUES – PLEASE SEE THE DUES FORM ON LAST PAGE

FIRE ENGINE NEEDS REPAIRS

George Wasson, Chairman of the Fire Engine Committee, and thereby driver and caretaker of Old Betsy, our 1919 Ford Model T fire engine, has informed the Society that Betsy is feeling more than a little run down lately. Time and her many years of service have taken their toll.

- The engine needs rebuilding; valves and piston rings need replacement.
- Betsy has a starter—but it doesn't work any more.
- The wooden parts—many in a Model T—are very worn and need replacement.
- The back board (platform) should also be replaced.
- There are dents to be removed and the finish really could use an update.

For some years the Society has maintained a savings account for maintenance of the fire engine. However, at its current balance of less than eight hundred dollars it won't go far toward covering the cost of present needs.

Are there some Model T experts out there who might be interested in contributing labor, parts for Betsy? Or money? Monetary contributions toward Betsy's expenses will be gratefully accepted.

Please call George Wasson, 283-4420 or 284-4603, if you can help. > >

1991-92 Officers and Committee Chairs

President	*Bill Wakeman*
Vice President	*Jop Van Overveen*
Treasurer	*Shirley Thomson*
Recording Secretary	*Ruth Dyer*
Corresponding Secretary	*Ollie Hamlin*
Annual Potluck Dinner	*Richard Johnson and Ollie Hamlin*
Archives	*Bill & Irma Somerton*
Book Sales	*Ruth Dyer*
Fire Engine	*George Wasson*
Hist. Displays	*Bill & Irma Somerton*
Landmarks	*Bob Means*
Membership	*Jack & Barbara Bailey*
Oral History	*Ray Peters, Marechal Duncan, and George Wasson*
Newsletter	*Shirley Thomson*
Program	*Jop and Irene Van Overveen*
Publicity	*Bill Somerton*
Walking Tours	*Collette Means*
(Without portfolio)	*George Ely*

DUES

Student membership	*$2.50*
Family membership	*$10.00*
Business membership	*$50.00*
Life membership	*$100.00*

NEXT BOARD MEETING

The next meeting of LHS Board members and committee chairs is scheduled for Tuesday, February 11, at the home of George Wasson. Call him at 283-4420 or 284-4603 for directions. Members welcome. > >

INTERESTED IN A DAY TRIP?

Program Chairs Jop and Irene Van Overveen would like to hear from you if you find any of the following ideas appealing for a February or March field trip.

- One-day train trip to Yosemite National Park with lunch at the Ahwahnee Hotel. This is an Amtrak tour from Martinez and includes a tour bus ride at the Yosemite end. Cost per person is about $70, including lunch.
- Day trip to Sacramento by train, leaving at 8:35 a.m. and returning on the 5:05 train. We could see Old Sacramento, the railroad museum, and have lunch together there. Cost would be $13 ($11.50, seniors) plus lunch.
- Day trip to a Bay Area site—you name it. Let us hear what you'd like to see. As a non-profit organization, LHS could have access to a bus and driver provided by a community-minded local business. So, if you've got suggestions for interesting sites you would like to visit, this is a fine opportunity for a pleasant outing at minimal cost.

See the 1/25/92 issue of *CC Times*, Sect. D, for more on train outings.

Call Jop or Irene at 283-3650, evenings.

Tunnel to Oakland, 1918

— ANNUAL DINNER MEETING —

TOM CREWS, SPEAKER

National Pony Express Association Member,
Researcher in Pony Express History

ON THE PONY EXPRESS TRAIL THROUGH LAFAYETTE

TUESDAY — MAY 12, 1992 — 6:00 P.M.
Lafayette Veterans Hall — Mt. Diablo Blvd. at First Street

Editor's Note

Shown here is a copy of a February 6, 1960, letter from John "Toddy" Briones.

Mr. Briones was a son of a Martinez blacksmith who came to the aid of the young rider (Thomas Bedford) on the last leg of his Pony Express journey to San Francisco.

The letter is reprinted here by permission of the Contra Costa County Historical Society; CCCHS owns the letter.

Mr Rev John H. Hinkley Martinez Feb 6 - 1960

Dear Sir

I can give you some information on the Pony Express as the horse that Tom Bradford rode from Vinita Oakland was my farther horse his horse had lost a shoe and had a tender foot my farther meet him on the boat as he Bradford put his saddle & mail on my farthes horse horse as my farther was coming from Benicia where he went after some horse shoes with heels & toe clip which is better for the hills so they changed horses in Martinez as my farther Filipe Briones was a horse raider the largest in the County Filipe Briones shod his own horses he had 125 Brood mares the time made that time was 1 hr & 45 minutes the second trip was shorter but to hilly up the Briones road to top of Briones Hills to more ranch & down to Lafayette 2 am in Martinez 86 yrs

John Briones
1234 Ward St
Martinez
Calif

PONY EXPRESS
NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

Following passage of HR479 by House and Senate, the Pony Express land route from Martinez to Oakland is being studied by the Interior Department to determine if it is to be designated part of the Pony Express National Historic Trail. It is expected that it will indeed be so designated.

Local researchers have already done much to document the record of the overland trail used through this county, and some dedicated people are continuing that work. From Martinez the route is thought to have been through the Alhambra Valley, over the Briones and Moore ranches and into Lafayette on the road later called Happy Valley Road, then continuing on Fish Ranch Road (then known as Telegraph). The record shows that Express ponies and their young riders came through Lafayette twice in April 1860, once in March of 1861, and twice again in June 1861. In addition, there was another instance in which the rider took the Overland Stage through here.

A drive to place markers in the communities through which the trail runs is gathering momentum. The city of Martinez expects to erect a pony and rider monument, and other communities—including our own—are planning to place plaques to serve as visible reminders of this short but exciting chapter in American history.

LHS is interested in furthering this work; at its January meeting Marechal Duncan was named to chair the Society's Pony Express Committee. >

Editor's Note

Following up on the feature story in our last issue, we present here another view of Lafayette in the 1930s in some excerpts from the oral history record. The entertaining and informative LHS program recorded in April 1977 gave us Mickey Meyers and Lou Borghesani looking back to their early years in Lafayette. The material quoted here is from Lou Borghesani, owner of the Round Up for many years. Editor's inserts are enclosed in brackets.

President Bill Wakeman remembers that when he was a kid he rode his bicycle over to Lou's to buy beer for his dad. Bill carried some money and a note from dad, so Lou let him buy the beer. In time, after two or three such errands, however, Lou called an end to that. His dad would have to come for his beer himself. >

LAFAYETTE IN THE 1930s AND '40s

by Lou Borghesani

I'll tell you some of the things that happened and didn't happen (and why) in Lafayette. I was born in 1902 in Martinez, so I was familiar more or less with Lafayette. But I knew about Lafayette by travelling through, going to Berkeley by way of the tunnel which you were scared to go through but you went through anyway. I followed construction work for several years, and in 1926 I was in Florida during the hurricane there, and had to come back to California because everything stopped. I came back to Martinez and went on the bridge job where they were testing for the railroad bridge.

When that was through, I came to Lafayette because the dam had been started (1927) and I became foreman on this job. I was foreman on the job the night it caved in, in 1928 at 1:30 a.m. One of my men on a truck hauling dirt came running out. I happened to be at the far end of the dam, and he says, "Hey, Lou, the dam is caving in . . . it's cracking!" I thought the guy must have been drinking. So I rushed in (I had a Hudson Brougham then) and sure enough, it was cracking and sinking. It had sunk ten feet in some places . . . at the outer edge of it, in a big hundred-foot circle. We got hold of the big men out there, Mr. Sturgeon and others, and we had the job stopped. We had ten more days to finish, but we stopped, and that was the end of that job. I think the water company finished the job about two years later.

I eventually got in on a beer truck through my parents, and it was promised that if I did well on the route, I could buy it. Well, I had Lafayette, Concord, Orinda . . . and when the day came for the agreement, after I'd worked the route up, it didn't materialize. So I quit on June 5, 1934.

I was practically broke, so I rushed over to the people who were going to back me up in this business – one in Pittsburg and one in Port Chicago – and told them what happened. I said that there was a little business in Lafayette that I knew about, and that I'd like to buy it. That was Ma Hunt's place, the Lafayette Inn.

Horse Show Association parade, 1935

continued on next page . . .

Borghesani: "Lafayette in the1930s and '40s," continued

Ma Hunt was a well-known person—famous for her pies—and people would come in for years asking about her. I never knew her personally, but I knew the family. Anyway, that's how I happened to come the 6th day of June, 1934 (I'll never forget that).... [I] walked in, asked the people who were leasing the place if I could buy the business. Well, they wanted $1,150, and all I could get was $950 from these people. So they looked it over—they were shrewd people and had a little money—and I told the others, "Look, supposing I give you $950 and pay the rest in three months?" They went for it. But the deal had to be that night and the next morning I take over, because I didn't want to lose any of the stock they had.... so they did make the deal, and the next morning at seven o'clock I was in there doing business. Fortunately, I was able to raise the rest of the money in the next two or three months. And that's how I started business.

Well, time went on, and I attended several of the meetings here of the Improvement Club, with Mrs. Hetherington, Mr. Snedeker, and several others. We talked it over and they had this fiesta coming . . . at the Town Hall. That was 1934 . . . and I had my place of business going pretty good. Things were pretty cheap: ten cents for a hamburger, ten cents for a glass of beer, people going to work for a dollar a day—eight or nine hours' work. But anyway, we talked about this fiesta they were going to have, and I thought what a wonderful thing for my business . . . I'd just move it down there to the Town Hall for one night. So I did just that, closed down my place of business and moved everything down there and carried on my business with all the proceeds going to the Improvement Club for this fiesta. Well, we did real well . . . I think we even had some slot machines down there that night too.

By the time that successful night was over, we talked about having a horse show in connection with the fiesta. It was greeted well by Mr. Snedeker and the Floods and others, Mrs. Hetherington and Stanley, all of whom were tied up with the Town Hall. So I got to working on that, and *got hold* of the Floods, Dave Finley, McNeil, Soule, and Paul Alberts, the main man—he had a riding stable somewhere out here—and asked them what they thought about it, and they thought it was a great thing. Paul Alberts put it all together, and this horse show started in 1935 on the school grounds here in Lafayette (there was about two or three acres there) and the sheriff's office came along and helped us make an arena and that was the first horse show—September 1935—and second Fiesta. And then from 1936 on all the horse shows were on Dr. Hamlin's property. The first money that was raised helped put the tennis court at the grammar school . . . around $2,700. So that was how the horse shows got started. And they were strictly amateur horse shows.....

Anyone could enter and everyone got a ribbon or honorable mention of some sort. Someone could come in with a swayback horse with a rope around its nose, but as long as they performed their duties, they got a prize.

The Lafayette Horse Show also gave birth to the Contra Costa Sheriff's Posse. About the second year John Miller started it with a beautiful array of horses. And that same posse grew to quite an extended posse. They went to the Islands and performed after this and also went to Eisenhower's inauguration. The *Western Horseman's Magazine* was created here by Paul Alberts.

Sidewalks were put in in Lafayette in about 1937 or '38, starting at Hough Street [Lafayette Circle] down to where the old Post Office used to be [Killarney House], and there was quite a step-off to go to Bill's [Bill's Restaurant, located on World Savings site] and remained that way for quite a few years until they improved it. Then it went up to Col. Garrett's building [Tourelle Restaurant]. The work was done by the people who were doing the work on the highway.

Lafayette had a lot of things going. It was a lot of fun. Horses used to come into my place during the day. I had a hitching post and a water trough and a man to take care of that water with Blue Rock to make sure the horses never got sick.... I remember one time Peggy Donaldson rode her horse in (she had a stable over in Orinda) and I said, "Hey, Peggy, get that horse out of here. Your horse is getting nervous." *He didn't make it.*... So I go in and get my white coat and my shovel, open up the double doors, and shovel it out. I used to buy one-inch boards to keep the horses from going through the floors. I also kept a supply of carrots.... Every horse got a carrot and every rider got a beer (if he stayed on his horse)!

And that's about it. > >

UPCOMING EVENTS . . .

Feb. 1 . . . . . Orinda Historical Society's "Picture Identification Day," Orinda Library meeting room, 10a.m. to 4p.m.; prize for person identifying most unknown people and pictures.

March 7 . . . . . Orinda Historical Society Field Trip to Saratoga; write P.O. Box 82, Orinda, for more information

March 19 . . . . . San Ramon Valley Historical Society dinner meeting, SRV Royal Golf Course

MEMBER INFORMATION

last name | first name | spouse's first name

street address | phone number

city, state, zip code | date

Annual dues: Please check appropriate line indicating dues, attach check in the amount shown – adding any contribution you can make toward the fire engine repair fund and/or the Pony Express site marker – and mail to Lafayette Historical Society, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549.

___ Student membership - $2.50
___ Family membership - $10
___ Business membership - $50
___ Life membership - $100

DUES $_____
Contribution to help maintain "Old Betsy" _____
Contribution toward Pony Express marker _____

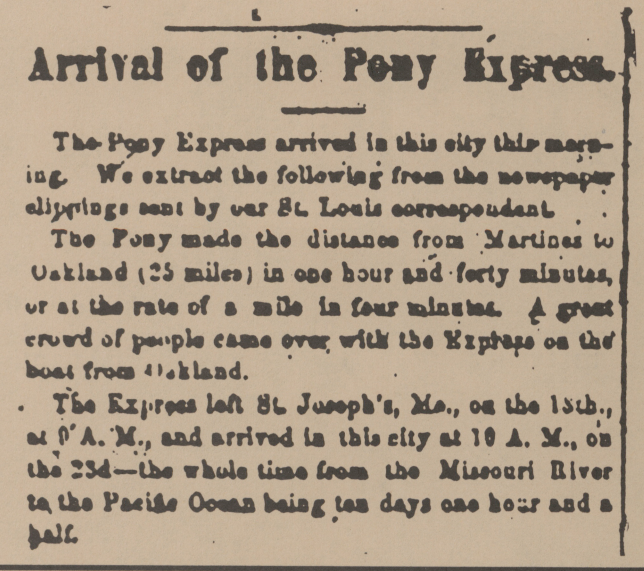
TOTAL ENCLOSED: $_____

Please indicate your areas of special interest

___ Archives
___ Landmarks
___ Fire engine
___ Telephone committee
___ Annual potluck dinner committee
___ Other: _____

___ Oral history
___ Photograph collection
___ Newspaper clippings
___ Walking tours
___ Pony Express

From the April 24, 1860,
Daily Alta California.



Arrival of the Pony Express.

The Pony Express arrived in this city this morning. We extract the following from the newspaper clippings sent by our St. Louis correspondent.

The Pony made the distance from Martinez to Oakland (25 miles) in one hour and forty minutes, or at the rate of a mile in four minutes. A great crowd of people came over with the Express on the boat from Oakland.

The Express left St. Joseph's, Mo., on the 13th., at __ A. M., and arrived in this city at 10 A. M., on the 23d—the whole time from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean being ten days one hour and a half.

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FIRST CLASS MAIL